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ABSTRACT

This publication was prepared as a tribute to Asian and Pacific American women. Stereotypes of Asian and Pacific women are discussed in historical and present-day contexts. Demographic statistics regarding families, education, and employment are presented to illustrate the impact of recent Asian and Pacific immigration trends. The emergence of an Asian and Pacific American women's movement and the emergence of the women from their traditional roles and stereotypes are discussed. A selected reading list and a guide to Asian and Pacific American women's organizations are included. (MK)

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BEYOND STEREOTYPES AND STATISTICS:

EMERGENCE OF ASIAN AND PACIFIC AMERICAN WOMEN

by Juanita Tamayo Lott and Canta Pian

Organization of Pan Asian American Women

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CORRECTIONS:

In the "Statistics" section, paragraphs 6 and 7 should be before paragraph 1.

In the "Emerging" section, paragraph 14 should be inserted between paragraphs 8 and 9.

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BEYOND STEREOTYPES AND STATISTICS:

EMERGENCE OF ASIAN & PACIFIC AMERICAN WOMEN

In Fall 1976, a group of Asian and Pacific American women* in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area formed the Organization of Pan Asian American Women (Pan Asia). The major goal of the organization is to ensure the participation of Asian and Pacific American women in all aspects of American society, especially in those areas where Asian and Pacific Americans and women have been excluded or underrepresented.

To achieve this goal of significant participation, the present objectives of Pan Asia are: 1) to develop a nationwide communications network among Asian and Pacific American women; 2) to provide leadership training and experience for Asian and Pacific American women; and 3) to facilitate the appointment of Asian and Pacific American women to national advisory and policymaking bodies in both public and private sectors.

On the occasion of Asian and Pacific American Heritage Week, May 4-10, 1979, the Organization of Pan Asian American Women, with the assistance of the Women's Bureau/Department of Labor, has prepared this publication as a tribute to all Asian and Pacific American women who must balance responsibilities at home, in the community and at work.

*The terms Asian and Pacific American women and Pan Asian Women will be used interchangeably throughout this report.

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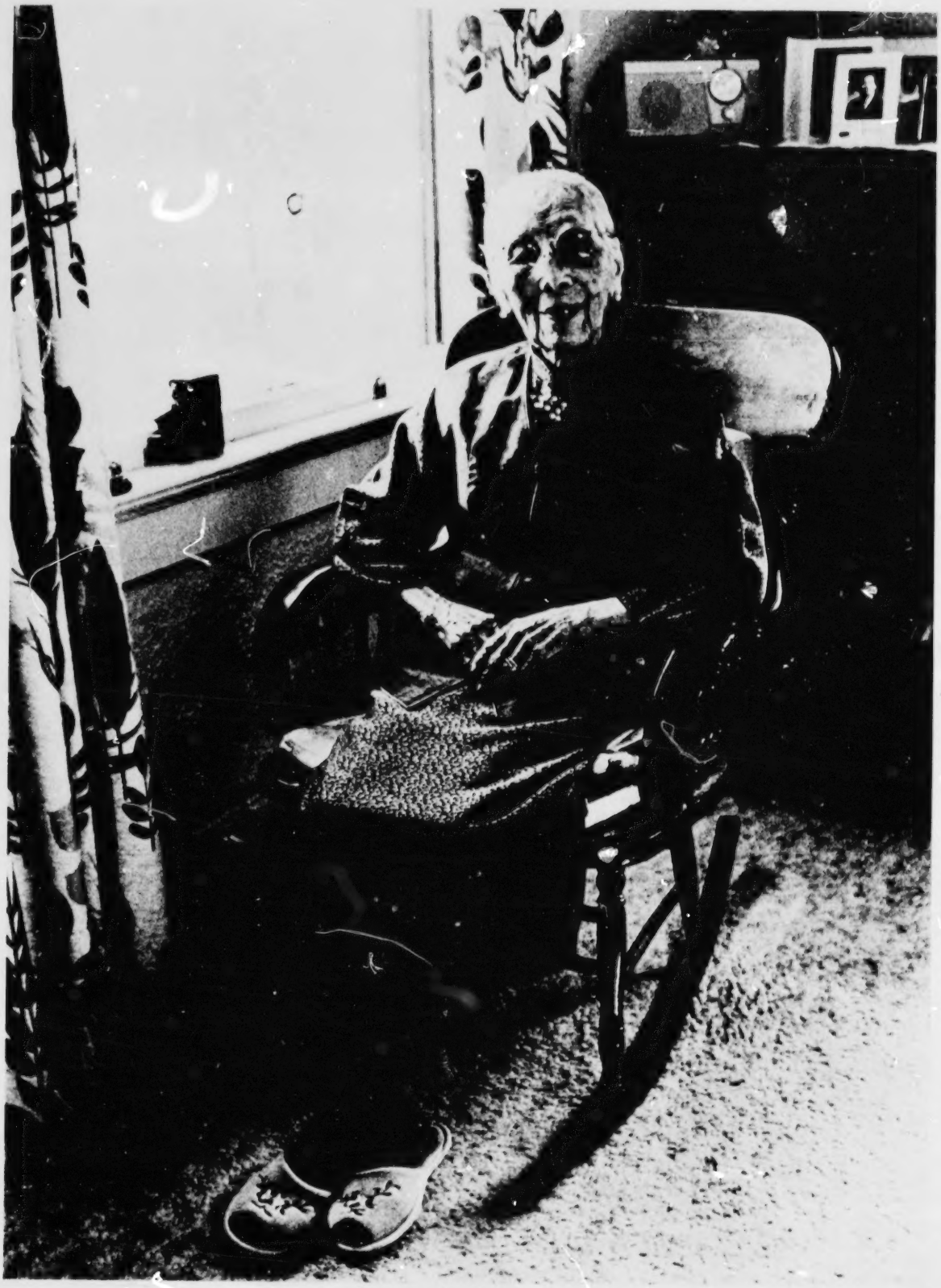

STEREOTYPES

Very little is known about Asian and Pacific American women. What passes for fact about this group of women is no more than a smattering of stereotypes, sometimes coupled with statistics, but more often, standing at face value. These stereotypes have been created primarily by men and bear very little relationship to the emerging Pan Asian women who must balance responsibilities at home, in the community and at work.

There are many stereotypes of Asian and Pacific American women. The most popular are "exotic/erotic," as embodied in the character of Suzie Wong, and "passive/demure," as portrayed by actress Miyoshi Umeki.

"Exotic/erotic" was fabricated by white American men whose political, economic and military presence in Asian and Pacific lands dates back to the turn of the century. In the minds of these men, "Hula Miss" awaits their return in Bali-Hai while "China Doll" takes them to Shangri-la. In their lives, these men package Pan Asian women as young, foreign, sexual commodities — a stereotype shared by much of American society, including Pan Asian women who play the mysterious beauty from the Orient, replete with Westernized breasts and eyes.

"Passive/demure" is a pervasive stereotype of Pan Asian women, originating in traditional patriarchal Asian and Pacific families where many Pan Asian women begin their lives as dutiful, reserved and submissive daughters. While not all Asian and Pacific families are patriarchal, Asian and Pacific women find themselves in an American society which fosters the notion of men as heads of households. Many Pan Asian women find themselves dutiful, reserved and submissive girlfriends, housewives and mothers — helpmates providing unrecognized, unrewarded support to husbands and sons.

Related to, but distinct from, "passive/demure" is the stereotype of "neuter gender," — a stereotype specific to employed Asian and Pacific American women, particularly the mid-level class of technicians, administrative assistants and scientists. These women are intelligent, hardworking, productive, and oftentimes, well-educated. In contrast to "erotic/exotic" and "passive/demure," which connote sensual, irrational beings, "neuter gender" views Pan Asian women as rational beings to the exclusion of sensuality. These women are viewed as competent aids and tools, without faces and personalities.

A fourth stereotype of Asian and Pacific American women, also imposed by males, is "dragon lady." This label is reserved only for Pan Asian women deemed almost equal to men. The "dragon lady" is assertive, articulate, calculating and effective. She is both admired and feared for her sensuality and rational being.

In contrast to the above stereotypes is that of the "woman warrior" adopted by some Pan Asian women. This romanticized stereotype, made popular by Maxine Hong Kingston in the book of the same name, finds its modern day counterpart in "revolutionary sister," in vogue during the anti-war movement. Essentially, the "woman warrior" or "revolutionary sister" dares to struggle, more often, to speak out against the "oppressor" of her community.

As might be expected, the stereotypes of Pan Asian women relate to stereotypes of the general Pan Asian population such as "model minority" which shares similar characteristics of hardworking and invisible with "passive/demure" and "neuter gender." Certainly Asian and Pacific Americans are considered foreign, regardless of the possibility that they may be sixth generation Americans.

The stereotypes of Pan Asian women are simplistic and in fact, contradictory. As the following section on statistics shows, Pan Asian women are more complex and varied than popular stereotypes would lead one to believe. Moreover, the discussion on emerging Asian and Pacific American women indicates that Pan Asian women are questioning stereotypes about themselves and, in increasing numbers, are flinging aside these traditional images to assume new roles.

This recent migration is in large part due to relaxation of exclusionary immigration laws which, in the pre-1965 era, had prohibited many groups of Pan Asian women from settling in this country in large numbers. In recent years, however, a majority of the immigrants from Asia have been women. They comprised about 60% of all Korean and Pilipino immigrants and over 50% of all Chinese immigrants coming to the U.S. since 1970.

The marriage of Pan Asian women to American servicemen stationed in Asian and Pacific lands is the second major cause for the increased immigration of Pan Asian women to the U.S. The National Committee Concerned with Asian Wives of U.S. Servicemen estimates that some 200,000 Asian-born wives of U.S. servicemen reside in the United States.

Families

In 1976 Asian and Pacific American families, on the average, were larger than white families, averaging 3.99 people to the average 3.50 people in white families. A common pattern among immigrants is for recently arrived families and individuals to move in with their already established relatives. Later, then they can afford to do so, the new arrivals move into separate households of their own.

About 9 out of 10 Pan Asian families are husband-wife families, the same proportion as is found in the white population; nine percent of Pan Asian families are headed by a woman. A fifth of all Pan Asian households are composed of individuals who live alone. More than half of these are women.

While rates of intermarriage for Pan Asian women vary by age group and locale (with the highest rate among younger women), nearly a quarter of all married Pan Asian women have married outside their ethnic group.

STATIS

In the U.S. today are about 1.5 million Asian and Pacific American women who comprise over half of the total Asian and Pacific American population in the United States. The largest groups include the Japanese, the Pilipinas,** the Chinese, the Koreans, the Indochinese, and the Asian Indians. Nearly two-thirds of all Asian and Pacific American women reside in California, Hawaii, and Washington. However, sizeable communities have been established in major cities throughout the country.

While Asian and Pacific American communities have been established within the U.S. for several generations, most of the population are relatively recent arrivals. In

*The data from this section were compiled from the 1970 Census, the 1975 Survey of Income and Education, and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service annual reports.

**This is the contemporary spelling for persons of Philippine ancestry. There is no F sound or letter in the Pilipino language.

STICS

1976, fully 60% of all Asian women had immigrated to the United States since 1970.

Education

The educational profile of Pan Asian women is a disparate one. Levels of education among Asians in the U.S. tend to be high. Adult Pan Asian women have had a median of 12.7 years of schooling compared to 12.4 years for white women and 12.5 years for white men. Many educated women with professional backgrounds have recently immigrated to the U.S. The pursuit of a college education continues among Pan Asian youth and, in 1975, about half of all young Pan Asian men and women, 18-24 years old, were enrolled in college.

However, in some subpopulations, educational attainment has not been so high. Among Pan Asian wives of U.S. servicemen and Indochinese refugees, for example, the median educational level is only up to the eighth grade.

Livelihood

Asian and Pacific American women are in the labor force to a greater extent than the women of any other racial group. While Asian cultural values strongly encourage working and disapprove of unemployment, the fact that more Pan Asian families have multiple wage earners than other families strongly suggests that Pan Asian women must work to support their families. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of all adult Pan Asian women are in the work force compared to 58% of white women and 62% of black women. Some women are highly educated and have been able to overcome English language handicaps and sex and racial barriers to find good jobs at professional levels. Other women, however, less educated and less proficient in English, work in factories, restaurants, or in small retail shops, toiling for long hours at meager wages. One fourth of the employed Asian and Pacific women work professional occupations. About a third work in clerical and sales jobs — the traditional women's occupations. The majority of remaining Pan Asian women work in semi- and low-skilled operative and service occupations, i.e. less "desirable" jobs such as waitresses, maids, and sewing machine operators.

An examination of the median income levels of Asian and Pacific American women shows that, like all women, their earning power lags behind that of men. In 1970 their median annual income ($4592) was less than half of the median annual income of white men ($9435). Comparisons by educational attainment show further that Asian women fall behind men. In 1970, the median income of college-educated white men was approximately $12,000; Pan Asian women with similar educations earned a median of only $5500.

EMERGING

The most notable aspect of the history of Asian and Pacific American women in the United States is their virtual absence until the middle of this century due to restrictive U.S. immigration policies toward Asian and Pacific lands.

For this reason, many Asian groups did not establish a significant second generation in America until immigration laws were liberalized after World War II. The majority of Asian and Pacific American women in the United States are still first generation, although the number of second, third and fourth generation women is increasing. Recent immigration has significantly increased the number and diversity of Asian women in America.

For most of their history in the U.S., Pan Asian women have had, and continue to have, a limited participation in American society. Most of their time has been devoted to rearing their families and working alongside their men to earn a livelihood. For many Pan Asian women, family and economic activities have occurred within the confines of their ethnic neighborhoods, reinforcing their isolation from events outside their immediate communities.

In the wake of the civil rights and women's movements, Pan Asian women have begun to question their limited roles. They have begun to grapple with the traditional stereotypic roles bestowed upon them and, in many cases, have begun to cast aside these roles emerging as assertive, articulate and active members of their communities. Today we see the emergence of an Asian women's movement that represents the bringing together of women of many different backgrounds — both U.S. born and foreign born — to learn about and resolve their issues and concerns. The move by Pan Asian women toward becoming persons in their own rights has proceeded from their realization that they had to act in a collective manner — both in informal groups and in formal organizations — to begin to replace their traditional roles with others that acknowledge them as equal persons.

Ironically, the first Asian and Pacific women's groups were established not to change traditional roles, but as auxiliaries to male organizations, existing because women were prohibited from membership in the parent organizations.

These extensions of male organizations perpetuated the traditional supportive role of women. Despite this drawback, auxiliary organizations provided Pan Asian women the first opportunities to work in a group situation and to assume the skills of both leader and follower. These skills were instrumental in moving Pan Asian women toward other organizational activities in their communities.

During the late sixties and the 1970s, Asian and Pacific American women became involved in the establishment of social service programs in local Pan Asian communities and Asian American Studies on college campuses. Initially relegated to secretarial and housekeeping roles, women in the social service programs gradually assumed the task of presenting the needs of Asian and Pacific American communities to local, state and federal officials, developing technical proposals and subsequently negotiating funds for community programs. They went on to implement and manage programs in health, employment, counseling, housing and education. Today, they are directors of many kinds of community programs. The women-directed Union of Pan Asian Communities in San Diego is an example of how Pan Asian women have gone on to address issues that cut at both sexism and racism. In terms of national Pan Asian organizations, Hawaiian and Japanese women have chaired the Pacific/Asian Coalition while Chinese and Pilipino women have led the Asian and Pacific American Federal Employee Council.

On campus, Pan Asian women engaged in dialogue with Pan Asian men, identifying analogies between racial and sex discrimination and instituting courses on Asian and Pacific American women. In 1971, Asian American Studies at U.C. Berkeley published the first journal on Pan Asian women entitled, "Asian Women," which has come to be a basic reference not only in Asian American Studies classes but also in public and private institutions. Other publications on Pan Asian women have been developed almost exclusively by Asian American Studies and other academic programs.

Outside of local communities and college campuses, other Pan Asian women were also beginning to discard traditional roles and stereotypes. During the affirmative action era of the 1970s, a few Pan Asian women were exposed to organizational principles in the corporate, academic and public sectors. They learned how to set priorities, develop objectives and implement strategies to reach those objectives. Within the women's movement, they learned to apply such principles to such issues as equal pay for equal work, child care, reproductive choice and the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1976, Asian and Pacific American women met to discuss their issues at a national conference on Pacific and Asian American Women's educational and em-

ployment sponsored by the National Institute of Education. From the conference, participants articulated the need for a national network of Asian and Pacific American women to address issues of concern. As a result of this, the Organization of Pan Asian American Women was formed. At the local level, Asian and Pacific American women's organizations, already underway, began to realize the need to link local issues with national strategies and priorities. Whether at the national or local level, Asian and Pacific American women's organizations voiced concern for the visibility of Pan Asian women at every level of society and called for attention to a balance in the responsibilities of Pan Asian women at home, in their communities and in their work places.

In November 1977, these concerns were articulated publicly at the First National Women's Conference in Houston. Eighty-three Asian and Pacific American women delegates from across the country, diverse ethnic groups, all ages, and various soci-economic levels met to form the Asian and Pacific American Women's Caucus. In a formal statement, the Caucus raised the following concerns of Pan Asian women:

We of the Asian and Pacific American Women's Caucus recognize the need for multilingual and multi-cultural programs that are crucial to ensure the access of our peoples, including immigrants, to all educational, social, political, employment, health, housing and legal services.

These services and programs must take into account the uniqueness of our diverse cultures and communities with the goal of self-determination. The programs must be within our own communities and must be designed specifically for Asian and Pacific American women, including immigrants and Asian/Pacific wives of U.S. servicemen, garment workers, youth, single, older women and all other groups who have critical survival needs.

Subsequently, Asian and Pacific women joined with American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic and Black Women to develop the recommendation on minority women for the Plan of Action. The statement on Asian and Pacific American women served to further publicize the concerns of Pan Asian women.

As Asian and Pacific American women participated in social services and Asian American Studies, they began to realize the need for getting together on issues specific to women. They shared common problems related to child care, health, and family responsibilities

versus work responsibilities. Additionally they discussed issues unique to them as minority women such as their relationships with Asian men and non-Asian men, their need for visibility, and their concern to deal jointly with issues affecting their communities and issues affecting all women. They began to establish local Asian and Pacific American women's organizations, sometimes as "rap" sessions and other times around specific issues. Organizations such as Asian Women's Health Center in Los Angeles and the National Committee concerned with the Asian Wives of U.S. Servicemen emerged from these local efforts at organizing.

Asian/Pacific American Women

Asian/Pacific American Women are wrongly thought to be part of a "model minority" with few problems. This obscures our vulnerability due to language and culture barriers, sweatshop work conditions with high health hazards, the particular problems of wives of U.S. servicemen, lack of access to accreditation and licensing because of immigrant status and to many federally-funded services.

Epilogue

Asian and Pacific American women are daughters, sisters, wives and mothers of the Pan Asian communities. They share with all women the experience of sexism as a barrier to their full rights of citizenship. With other women of color, they experience the consequences of sexism and racism jointly.

As women emerging from traditional roles and popular stereotypes Asian and Pacific American women in concert with the Asian and Pacific American community, in union with all women and in partnership with men – holding up equal halves of heaven – they are emerging as visible and equal persons.

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